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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF**  
**H.R. 518**  
**NEOTROPICAL MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION IMPROVEMENT ACT**  
**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON**  
**FISHERIES & OCEANS**

**JUNE 23, 2005**

Good morning Mr. Chairman, Congressman Kind and members of the Subcommittee. I am George E. Wallace, Vice President and Chief Conservation Officer for American Bird Conservancy. American Bird Conservancy is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of wild native birds in the Americas. Founded in 1994, ABC is the only US-based group dedicated solely to overcoming the greatest threats facing native birds in the Western Hemisphere. ABC has 6,000 members and offices in Virginia and the District of Columbia. In addition, ABC has staff in California, Indiana, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New York, and Oregon.

I am delighted that my first opportunity to appear before you is in support of H.R. 518 – the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Improvement Act of 2005. The bipartisan spirit of H.R. 518 mirrors the same spirit exhibited when the original Act was introduced in the House, in 1999, by Congressman Don Young with cosponsors Congressmen George Miller and Jim Saxton

I coordinate bird conservation projects throughout the Americas for the American Bird Conservancy. In the United States this includes bird habitat conservation projects that benefit many species of neotropical migrant birds along with many other bird species. I also am in charge of educational campaigns to promote sound public policy to benefit birds.

American Bird Conservancy has long been a leader in Partners in Flight and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative or NABCI. Interior Secretary Norton recently

signed a letter of intent with Canada and Mexico to strengthen cooperation on bird conservation as part of NABCI. Our International Program works on as many as 30 projects per year in Latin America and the Caribbean. Many of these projects focus specifically, or in part, on neotropical migrant birds.

Neotropical migratory bird species provide invaluable environmental, economic, recreational, and aesthetic benefits to the United States as well as to Latin American and Caribbean nations. Over 300 neotropical bird species migrate south of our border each winter. As Congress recognized when it overwhelmingly passed the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 2000, many neotropical migratory bird populations, once considered common are now in decline. Some birds have declined to the point of near extinction. Bird species listed under the Endangered Species Act include the Piping Plover and Kirtland's Warbler. Many neotropical migrants are spectacular long-distance migrants that are found only in limited areas and in low population numbers such as the Red Knot and Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Others are moderately common at this point, but are experiencing dramatic population declines and/or are facing severe threats, such as the Swallow-tailed Kite and Cerulean Warbler.

Despite the efforts of federal and state agencies and nongovernmental organizations, many bird species are still in decline. In all cases, neotropical migrant birds often require complex management strategies because they may face threats on their breeding grounds, wintering grounds, or as they migrate to and from these areas. As a result, these management strategies are often best handled through multi-national cooperation and action.

The objectives of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act are three-fold, and are as applicable today as they were in 2000:

- (1) to perpetuate healthy populations of neotropical migratory birds;
- (2) to assist in the conservation of neotropical migratory birds by supporting conservation initiatives in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean; and
- (3) to provide financial resources and to foster international cooperation for those initiatives.

The Act realizes these objectives through a competitive grants program administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

As recipients of several Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act grants, ABC has considerable on-the-ground experience in habitat protection, education, research, monitoring, and capacity building to provide for the long-term protection of neotropical migratory birds. Among the grants to ABC is a multi-year project between US partners in Washington, Oregon, and California, and Central American partners in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua to conserve oak-dependent bird species such as the Lewis's Woodpecker and the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler.

We have received two grants to study the impact of silvopastoral conversion of rangeland in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Colombia on neotropical migrant and resident birds.

Silvopasture is a method of more tree cover on rangeland for cattle that can increase meat and dairy production while providing habitat for birds. Our most recent grant will develop a migratory bird conservation partnership between the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture in the US and NGOs and universities in Tamaulipas and Quintana Roo, Mexico

through the support of an integrated monitoring program for migrant and resident birds as well as training, public outreach, and environmental education in Mexico.

This valuable hands-on conservation experience has also provided ABC with insight into how the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act can be further strengthened to provide even more conservation benefits. Importantly, H.R. 518 includes modifications to the original Act that will do just that – provide even more conservation benefits that will further strengthen bird conservation efforts in the Western Hemisphere.

Specifically, H.R. 518:

- Increases funding from \$5 million for Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007, to \$10 million for Fiscal Year 2008, and \$15 million for Fiscal Year 2009. Increased funding is critical since each year hundreds of excellent grant applications go unsupported for lack of funds. Bird conservation investments in the U.S. will not be effective without making similar investments to conserve neotropical migratory birds throughout their hemispheric ranges.
- Reduces the demanding 3:1 matching ratio to 1:1 for all projects. The differences in pay scales and the overall access to resources between the United States and Latin America and the Caribbean often make it very difficult for project partners in those regions to provide sufficient match, either in-kind or in cash. There are many good projects which are simply not able to apply for support. The 1:1 match ratio will foster more international cooperation in bird conservation.

- Allows projects based in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico to meet the match requirement through either cash or in-kind payments.
- Allows projects in Canada to be eligible for funding when the appropriated amount is greater than \$10 million, thus making the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act a truly Western Hemispheric conservation program; and
- Requires the Secretary of the Interior to convene an advisory group to assist in carrying out the Act. ABC would be honored and pleased to serve on such an advisory group if requested.

Mr. Chairman, ABC is pleased to join a host of other bird conservation organizations in supporting H.R. 518. Many of these organizations are members of the Bird Conservation Alliance. The Alliance, facilitated by American Bird Conservancy, is a network of organizations that focus on bird conservation, study, education, observation, and advocacy. Together they represent millions of concerned citizens, united for the conservation of birds.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. American Bird Conservancy was a strong proponent of legislation to reauthorize the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Improvement Act in the last Congress and looks forward to continuing to work with you and Congressman Kind in seeking passage of H.R. 518.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.